

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMUNITY SERVICES & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
SEPTEMBER 15, 2021**

ATTENDANCE: Barbara Smyth, Chair; Greg Burnett, Dominique Johnson,
Thomas Keegan, Diana Revolus, Kadeem Roberts, Nicholas Sacchinelli

OTHERS: Lamond Daniels, Chief of Community Services; Maria Escalera

1. CALL TO ORDER/ ROLL CALL

Ms. Smyth called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. A quorum was present.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There was no one from the public present.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MEETING HELD ON JULY 21, 2021

**** MR. BURNETT MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON JULY 21, 2021.**

Page 2, under **Approval of the Minutes**, please change the following motion from:

**** MR. BURNETTE MOVED TO CORRECT THE MINUTES AS
AMENDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

To:

**** MR. BURNETT MOVED TO CORRECT THE MINUTES AS
AMENDED.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON JULY 21, 2021 AS CORRECTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

4. DISCUSSION

**a. Community Services - General Updates by the Community Services
Department, Lamond Daniels**

Mr. Daniels narrated a PowerPoint presentation for the Committee members. He added that they also had an update on the Equity and Justice For All Initiative.

- The Veterans Park Food Program has been extended through to the end of September. They hope to extend it through the end of the year. He thanked the Connecticut Food Share and all the volunteers, including the Police and DPW for their assistance with the program.
- The NPS School Nutrition program will continue at the Frank A. Harris Nutrition Center.
- The Urban League of Southern Connecticut update.

Mr. Daniels then reviewed the schedule for COVID testing at Roton Middle School. Vaccine sites will be posted on the City website.

Equity and Justice for All – Mr. Daniels gave the background of the development of the Equity and Justice Commission. There were two major goals:

- The establishment of a Commission
- To assist City employees in updating the 1993 Blue Ribbon report.

Mr. Daniels then reviewed the four objectives for the Initiative. He explained that the program was focused on delivering the goals. The Community Engagement portion was a challenge, but it is the portion that lays the ground work for the initiative.

The consulting team has been focused on Phase One objectives and they will prepare a full report of their findings. However, there has not been the type of turn out from the various groups that they expected. The team has been working to invite residents to participate in the process, to trust the process and to believe the process.

The consulting team will provide their report with their findings and recommendations, the administration can analyze the appropriate direction and develop the action plan for Phases Three and Four.

Mr. Daniels thanked the Fairfield County Community Foundation and all those who have participated in the process. The work is not finished, it is an evolving process. The administration is in contact with NPS, Norwalk Acts and other groups about this initiative.

Mr. Burnett asked if the COVID testing was still free. Those who may not be vaccinated may be required by their employer may not be able to afford the frequent testing. Mr. Daniels said that the Roton Middle School site is a City site and free but they will ask for insurance information.

Mr. Burnett spoke about the role of the BOE Family Center which is to help families navigate through the school program maze. Mr. Daniels said that he had spoken with the Superintendent about how to coordinate services between the two entities.

Mr. Burnett thanked Mr. Daniels for the presentation on Equity and Justice. He said that the Blue Ribbon study that was done in 1993 might still have valid points and recommendations. Mr. Burnett said that Mr. Floyd had died almost 2 years ago and he would like to see some progress.

Mr. Daniels said that while the community wants to see some progress, but cautioned everyone that there were strong opinions regarding whether this initiative should be implemented at all. He explained that they look for low hanging fruit and the 1993 report is currently being reviewed. The issue focuses on determining whether the context for each issue has changed. The consultant team is working on making recommendations on easily attainable goals.

Ms. Revulus said the City already knows what the community needs and those issues have been discussed again and again. She pointed out that home ownership was critical and named a group that works on helping people purchase homes. Getting issues like this in order in an equitable manner, the community would see the changes and it would engender trust. The datapoints are repetitive, so it is time to move forward.

Mr. Daniels said that the City needs to have partnerships and to have organizations adopt the City's principles. Ms. Escalera said that the administration was working on providing language services for the residents through signage and a language line.

Mr. Keegan asked how involved the Police Department was in the initiative. Mr. Daniels said that they had not gotten to Objectives 3 and 4 yet. The administration is committed to getting there, but there are other complexities that they are dealing with at this time. Discussion followed.

Mr. Daniels said that Police Chief Kulhawik had been very supportive regarding this initiative.

Mr. Burnett suggested that Mr. Daniels and Ms. Escalera be invited to present this initiative at the next Council caucus.

Mr. Keegan noted that there were three Committee chairs present at the meeting. He said that as a police officer, it would be important to bring people together in celebration, such as a celebration of the life of the late Police Officer Cesar Ramirez.

Ms. Revolus said she felt that the Police Department was missing the community engagement when the officers were in their patrol cars rather than standing with the children on the corner. Officer Ramirez understood this.

Ms. Smyth spoke about the Norwalk ACTS and how it dove tails with the Youth Services goals.

Ms. Revolus said that she had spoken with an organization that attended meeting where the group feeling was that the School District was closed towards having outside organizations coming in to the schools. Ms. Smyth said that it would be best to speak to the Superintendent's Office about that.

Ms. Escalera spoke about Officer Ramirez's engagement with the community and mentioned a new officer, Lt. Dino, who was working on developing communication with the community. It is the small steps that effect long term change.

b. Presentation Family Navigator Program & Community Resource Hub, by Maria Escalera

Mr. Daniels introduced Ms. Escalera who would give an overview the Navigator program and explain why they need two part time positions to implement this.

Some of the key points of the initiative were:

Eligible families receive high quality internet access

Digital literacy for virtual learning.

The Family Navigator will be connected to food, housing, workforce, Mental health and other community resources.

The Family Navigator will enable the families to determine what is important to them for the care of their children. Distance learning can be difficult. The program will provide internet connections, allowing the families to participate in virtual learning along with providing ways to connect to community resources and services. This will empower the families in the school sphere.

Ms. Escalera gave an overview of the statistics based on the 292 families that they were able to assist during 2020/21 period. Food, clothing, Health care, Community connections, Disability services, Employment, Mental Health and Housing were key areas of needs. Discussion followed.

Ms. Escalera said that the Norwalk Community Resource Hub will provide a central information location for resources. It includes catchment towns. She gave a brief overview of the seven aspects of the hub along with the service statistics. A phone number, 203-854-7999, will connect the callers with Community Service Resource specialist Monday thru Friday from 9 to 5. This has been a soft launch and they have already assisted 76 callers.

Ms. Johnson said that she was very pleased that the administration had been able to serve 76 individuals already. The needs are probably much greater than anyone has realized.

Ms. Smyth said that it was incredible to know that the City was helping those who need it and she thanked Mr. Daniels and Ms. Escalera.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 20, 2021

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. REVOLUS MOVED TO ADJOURN.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services